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JOHN AND MARTHA DANIELS

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May 4. 1924:

Drishane House

Skibbereen

Ireland

Co Cork

Dear Mr Worcester Smith

I hope that you & your friends have read the Hunting chapters in my book, "Wheel-Tracks", as they give a reliable account of the class of hunting to be had in this country. In order to save time I will assume that you have done so, & in this letter will confine myself to the statistics for which you have asked me. (And I am sure you will understand that these are for yourself & your personal friends alone, & are not for publication in any way. I only mention this because I have once or twice had occasion to regret not having made some such proviso, so please forgive what is, I am sure, an unnecessary precaution where you or your friends are concerned.)

I will try & answer your questions in order, & will therefore begin with Climate.

I should say that very few hunting countries have as favourable a climate as this. In ~~the~~ last season here, 1918-19, we were not once stopped by frost & had no snow. There is a moderate rainfall (average about 42ⁱⁿ in 12 months) & we have, very occasionally, been sent home by violent storm. I usually put hounds to ~~early~~ morning road work about the middle of July, & used to cub-hunt from about the end of August. The regular season began on Nov. 1st, & ended March 31st with ^{one or two} ~~occasional~~ by-days on the hills in April. We have, of course, sometimes been stopped by frost, but seldom for more than a day or two, only once or twice, in my memory, for a week or more. We are much more fortunate in this respect than is any other pack in Ireland. Even Bandon has far more frost than we have in Skibbereen.

There are no hounds here now, & there has been no hunting since I gave up in 1919. I have been told that many of the farmers, & the townspeople of Skibbereen, have been hoping that I might start another pack, but I am sorry to say that this is quite impossible (for reasons of finance & health, chiefly.) I have heard of no one else being suggested. I think any person who contemplated bringing hounds here might be quite sure of no interference of that kind. As to a Committee; I had one because it kept useful people interested in the hounds & coverts, but they never took any practical part in the management. Hounds & kennels & stables were my private property, & I had no guarantee as to the amount of subscriptions. I preferred this arrangement.

There are 14 or 15 ~~regular~~ ^{local} coverts (mostly woodland) where I had ~~earth~~ ^{local} stoppers, (paid 2/6 to 5/- per stop) & could be ~~fairly~~ ^{fairly} sure of finding foxes. There are, besides, many hills, cliffs, outlying gorses, &c, where one can pick up a fox. My kennels were within 1/4 mile of Castle Townshend village. The farthest meet (1 only) was 16 miles, the average 6 to 9 miles from kennels. I have a small map that I can send, if required, showing coverts, distances &c. I hunted, (up to 1914) 5 days a fortnight. I think 2 days a week is enough, but I often had an extra by-day.

It is, of course, supremely necessary to keep on good terms with everyone, & specially the farmers. The land now belongs to them, so hunting is at their mercy. I am glad to say that I found them invariably friendly, (but I & my people have always lived there & been good friends with them, which of course helps very much.)

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a good deal of tact is necessary in dealing with them, as they are touchy if not taken the right way, & are quick to resent anything like bullying, or being abused, or sworn at, (as I have heard Masters do in other countries!) But if treated with courtesy & consideration, & as friends, they are delightful to deal with, & even though they may not ride, will help the sport.

You will find Skibbereen on the map (it is in the S.W. of the Co Cork) & you can take it as the centre of the hunting district. The name of this country is West Carbery, & it is an old & honoured name. The West Carbery Hunt dates from over a century ago. I think it would be excessively unpopular to attempt to change the name of the Hunt, & I should most certainly not wish a pack to be called "The Somerville Hounds". Of course anyone who brought his own hounds here could call the pack by his own name, & no one could object, but, as a measure of general popularity, I should very strongly advise sticking to the old name, which is known & loved, & has tradition to back it up.

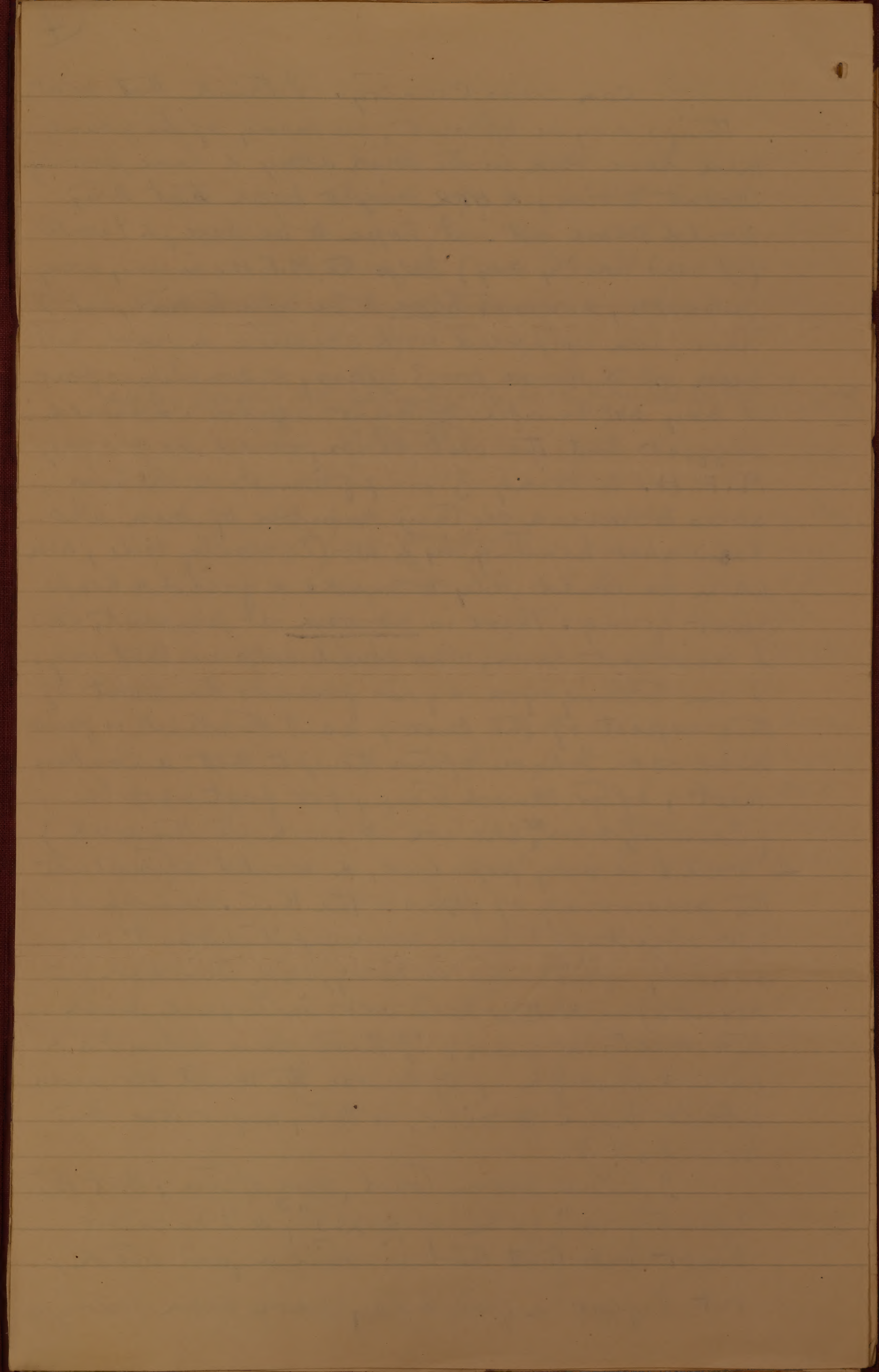
The Great War, & the recent troubled times, have emptied this country of the gentry, who were those that principally formed my field. There are two or three families of my relations who live in or near the village of Castle Townshend, & when the boys are home on leave from the army or navy, they ~~could~~ ^{might possibly} be counted on to come out, if at all possible for them to do so. My field used to average from 15 to 25, among whom were perhaps 3 or 4 farmers. On public holidays 10 or a dozen farmers would come out, but they don't breed hunters here, & few have horses that

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can cross country. I think that now things may be different, as many of the young men have been in the Irish Army & have probably learnt to ride, & ~~one~~ might hope that they would come out. I hope to be here, & I would (I need hardly say) help the M.F.H. in any way possible, & would hope to be able to ride, but I have been crippled with sciatica & have not been on a horse for 3 years, & sometimes fear I may not be able to hunt again. I should suggest that the best plan would be for any M.F.H. to bring 3 or 4 friends with him, so as to have a certain number of men who know what hunting is, & would really ride, & on whom he could rely to make a field & keep sport-going. There is no one at present, who is resident here, who could help in that way.

I am telling you & your friends the worst of this aspect of the case, as I think it is fairer to do so. I have often thought that a Sunday meet, after church time, for foot people — (Countrymen^{etc} who are at work all the week) — would be very popular, & would stimulate the preserving of foxes. The R.C. Church would not object — (I have seen capital sport on Sunday afternoons in Kerry, with trencher-fed hounds) — & this need not interfere with two meets a week, if there were hounds & horses enough. (Of course the Hunt servants would have to ride, or they might lose the hounds!)

I have been told, very often, that the country is "full of foxes", & I have no doubt but that there is still a good stock, but I fear a good many have been destroyed



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as they do a lot of damage, & there was no reason for preserving them.

My pack used to consist of about 21-22 Couple of very well bred foxhounds, bred from drafts from the best English & Irish packs, but on the small side, dogs up to about 23 inches, bitches from about 18 in. I found that light hounds, with good shoulders, did best in this very rough, rocky, & hilly Country, & Kerry Beagles did splendidly here. ^{After the War, in 1914, the expenses} were so heavy ^(a damned) that I had, finally, to bring the pack down to 11 or 12 Couple, & hunt (nominally) only 1 day a week, (2 a day, if possible) ^(number) This ^{was} not enough to draw some of our big coverts, & I think 17-18 Couple is what is required. I had two Hunt. servants, viz, Huntsman, & Whip, & 2 helpers. These did all the Kennels & Stable work. I had 5-6 horses, & got a loan of a horse now & then. I found this just enough for myself & 2 men, 2 days a week; (I admit that sometimes, with bad luck as to cuts & strains &c, I was run very short, & had to call on my friends for help.)

As I own a small farm, & had Kennels, stables, & huntsman's cottage, rent free, my expenses were less than they would be for others. Before the War, all expenses came to about £500 a year. My subscriptions were about £200-£250. The Fowl & Covert & Damage Fund did not exceed £70, but this was not really enough to compensate sufficiently generously to keep the poultry-owners in a good temper. I gave 10/- to the Farmer on whose land

(8)

we found, & 2/6 to the Earth stopper, if
and if we found & got the fox away, he got
another 2/6. It is an almost-impossible
country to stop, being full of holes & rocks. We
killed very few foxes in consequence, as it took
a good ten miles in the open to kill one of these
big, long-legged hill-foxes. They can beat any
hounds over a short distance.

I do not know what the cost of keeping a
small pack here ^{say 18 couple} would be now. I should
say about 1/3rd more than before the war.
If the M.F.H. were his own huntsman, & only
had one whipper-in (who would be Kennel
Huntsman) & 1 groom, & a couple of boys
as helpers in stable & kennels, I should
think £600 or £700 a year ought to be enough.
I don't know what prices horses are now
fetching in Ireland (I have sold mine in
England) but I shd imagine that £60 to
£80 (or perhaps less) would buy good ones.
I always bedded my hounds & horses on
bracken (fern) which is first rate bedding &
costs little more than the price of cutting & hauling.
Hay, last season, was £6.10.0 per ton, Oats
about £8 per ton. I do not know the present
prices of meal & biscuit.

Last year, despairing of the reestab-
-lishment of hunting here, I turned my kennels
into pig-sties, & the Hunt stables into cow-
-houses, & turned them over to the use of the
farm, which my sister, Lady Coehill, & my
brother, Colonel Somerville, & I, run jointly.
We have now a considerable number of pigs, &
the kennels & yards have been subdivided.
It would not cost a very great sum to

To refit them for hounds, & the stables for horses, but we should have to reduce our farming operations, & I regret to say, could not afford to do so unless we received rent for the required premises. We are all half-ruined by the long continued rioting & unrest, & I fear that subscriptions (if required) could not be relied on, though I know a Pack of Hounds would be welcomed with enthusiasm, & it is possible that visitors might come to the country if there were a hope of sport, & that some subs^{ns} might come in.

Now as to accommodation. In Castle Townshend village (within $\frac{1}{4}$ mile of Kenneil) there are 2 large, unfurnished houses. One, The Castle, has 300 acres of rough wood land, with good woodcock, snipe & duck shooting. The wood also holds a lot of foxes. There are 2 or 3 other country houses within 4 or 5 miles of Skibbereen, with shooting, fox coverts, &c. There are also smaller houses in Castle Townshend. All have some stabling. Furniture could be hired in Cork. The rents would not (I imagine) be at all high. The owners have all gone away to England.

The Castle is a very nice house, is on the sea, with beautiful scenery all round, & is convenient in all ways, boating, bathing, or fishing.

During my last 3 seasons I had two local men, brothers, as Huntsman & Whip. Both first-rate riders, who know the country & the people intimately. One of them is now my groom. He was my huntsman & Kennel Huntsman, & learnt his work with a thoroughly experienced English professional huntsman -

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Both these men are very good riders,
& are ^{absolutely} sober & reliable, & popular with the
country people. If desired, it might be
possible for an incoming M.F.H. to engage
one of them.

To end this long account, I may say
that although this is not a country of long
runs, as the bogs & hills are all in the
foxes' favour, yet it is a thoroughly interesting
& sporting country for anyone who loves hound-
work & real wild hunting. I have had people
from Leicestershire, Meath, & Kildare (among
many others) out with me, & all have enjoyed
it enormously. To keep with hounds you
must have a clever & fairly fast horse, &
a good knowledge of the country, but these can
both be acquired. The scenery, in most parts,
is very beautiful, & will compensate for a
blank day, & there is always lots of jumping,
no gates, & hardly any wire.

I hope I have now answered all
questions. I should be grateful for the
return of these notes whenever you & your
friends have quite finished with them,
as they may possibly be required again,
& I should be glad to be spared having
to re-write them.

Yours sincerely

W. J. Mervill

P.S. I forgot to say that it would not be
advisable to hunt hares, as there is a local
Coursing Club.

There is a small pack of hounds at Bandon, 35 miles from Skibbereen & Cork,
is 52 miles. From Cork & excellent packs can be reached. Limerick
is about a day's journey from here.

Please return to

Miss E. CE. Somerville

Drishane House

Ireland

SKIBBEREEN

Co Cork -

(Dec. 30. 1927)

